

And whos child that it was he bad hir hyde
from every wight, for oght that may bityde.

The sergeant gooth, and hath fulfild this
thyng;
But to this markys now retourne we;
For now gooth he ful faste ymaginyng
If by his wyves cheere he myghte se,
Or by hire word aperceyve that she
were chaunged; but he nevere hire koude fynde

But evere in oon ylike sad and kynde.

As glad, as humble, as bisy in servyse,
And eek in love, as she was wont to be,
Was she to hym in every maner wyse;
Ne of hir doghter noght a word spak she.
Noon accident for noon adversitee
Was seyn in hire, ne nevere hir doghter name
Ne nempned she, in earnest nor in game.

Explicit tercius pars. Sequitur pars quarta.



THIS ESTANT ther passed been foure yeer
Er she with childe was; but, as God wolde,
A knave child she bar by this Walter,
ful gracious and fair for to biholde.
And whan that folk it to his fader tolde,
Nat oonly he, but al his contree, merye
Was for this child, and God they thanke and
herye.

Whan it was two yeer old, and fro the brest
Departed of his norice, on a day
This markys caughte yet another lest
To tempte his wyf yet ofter, if he may.
O nedelees was she tempted in assay!
But wedded men ne knowe no mesure.
Whan that they fynde a pacient creature.

Wyf, quod this markys, ye han herd er this,
My peple sikly berth oure mariage,

And namely, sith my sone yboren is,
Now is it worse than evere in al oure age.
The murmure sleeth myn herte and my corage;
for to myne eres comth the voys so smerte,
That it wel ny destroyed hath myn herte.

Now sey they thus: Whan Walter is agoon,
Thanne shal the blood of Janicle succede
And been oure lord, for oother have we noon;
And been wordes seith my peple, out of drede.
Swiche wordes I of swich murmur taken heede;
Wel oughte I of swich murmur taken heede;
for certainly I drede swich sentence,
Though they nat pleyn speke in myn audience.

I wolde lye in pees, if that I myghte;
Wherfore I am disposed outrely,
As I his suster servede by nyghte,
Right so thanke I to serve hym pryvely.
This warne I yow, that ye nat sodeynly
Out of youreself for no wo sholde outrely,
Beth pacient, and therof I yow preye.

I have, quod she, seyde thus, and evere shal,
I wol nothyng, ne nyl nothyng, certayn,
But as yow list; naught greveth me at al,
Though that my doghter and my sone be slayn
At youre comandement; this is to sayn,
I have noht had no part of children tweyne,
But first siknesse, and after wo and peyne.

Ye been oure lord, dooth with youre owene thyng
Right as yow list; axeth no reed at me;
for as I left at hoom al my clothyng,
Whan I first cam to yow, right so, quod she,
Lefte I my wyl, and al my libertee,
And took youre clothyng; wherfore I yow preye,
Dooth youre plesance, I wol youre lust obeye.

And certes, if I hadde prescience
Your wyl to knowe er ye youre lust me tolde,
I wolde it doon withouten negligence;
But now I woot youre lust and what ye wolde,
Al youre plesance ferme and stable I holde;
for wiste I that my deeth wolde do yow ese,
Right gladly wolde I dyen, yow to plesse.

Deth may noht make no comparisoun
Unto youre love. And whan this markys sey
The constance of his wyf, he caste adoun
his eyen two, and wondreth that she may
In pacience suffre al this array.
And forth he goth with dreary contenance,
But to his herte it was ful greet plesance.

THIS ugly sergeant, in the same wyse
That he hire doghter caughte, right so he,
Or worse, if men worse kan devyse,
hath hent hire sone, that ful was of beautee.
And evere in oon so pacient was she,
That she no chiere maade of hevynesse,
But kiste hir sone, and after gan it blesse;

Save this: she preyde hym, that if he myghte,
hir litel sone he wolde in erthe grave,

h 4

His tendre lymes, delicaat to sighte,
fro fowles and fro beestes for to save;
But she noon answer of hym myghte have.
He wente his wey, as hym nothyng ne roghte;
But to Boloigne he tendrely it broghte.

THIS markys wondreth evere lenger the moore
Upon hir pacience, and if that he
Ne hadde soothly knowen therbifoore
That parfitly hir children loved she,
He wolde have wend that of som subtiltee,
And of malice, or for cruel corage,
That she hadde suffred this with sad visage.

But wel he knew, that next hymself, certayn,
She loved hir children best in every wyse.
But now of women wolde I axen fayn,
If thise assaies myghte nat suffise?
What koude a sturdy housbonde moore devyse
To preeve hire wyfhood and hir stedfastnesse,
And he continuynge evere in sturdinesse?

But ther been folk of swich condicioun
That, whan they have a certein purpos take,
They kan nat stynte of hire entencioun,
But right as they were bounden to a stake
They wol nat of that firste purpos slake.
Right so this markys fulliche hath purposed
To tempte his wyf, as he was first disposed.

He waiteth, if by word or contenance
That she to hym was changed of corage;
But nevere koude he fynde variance;
She was ay oon in herte and in visage;
And ay the forther that she was in age,
The moore trewe, if that it were possible,
She was to hym in love, and moore penyble.

for which it semed thus, that of hem two
Ther nas but o wyl; for, as Walter leste,
The same lust was hire plesance also;
And, God be thanked, al fil for the beste.
She shewed wel, for no worldly unreste
A wyf, as of hirself, nothing ne sholde
Wille in effect, but as hir housbonde wolde.

The sclaudre of Walter ofte and wyde spradde,
That of a cruel herte he wikkedly,
for he a povre womman wedded hadde,
hath mordred bothe his children prively.
Swich murmure was among hem comunly.
No wonder is, for to the peples ere
Ther cam no word but that they mordred were.

for which, wheras his peple therbifoore
hadde loved hym wel, the sclaudre of his diffame
Made hem that they hym hatede therfore;
To been a mordre is an hateful name.
But nathelees, for earnest ne for game,
He of his cruel purpos nolde stente;
To tempte his wyf was set at his entente.

Whan that his doghter twelf yeer was of age,
he to the court of Rome, in subtil wyse

135

The Tale
of the
Clerk of
Oxenford